

# TIBETAN NEW YEAR JOURNEY

西藏

*Journey under wide blue  
skies through Qinghai  
and Gansu in a quest for  
immersion in authentic  
Tibetan culture*



INFORMATION PACK

18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021 - 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021

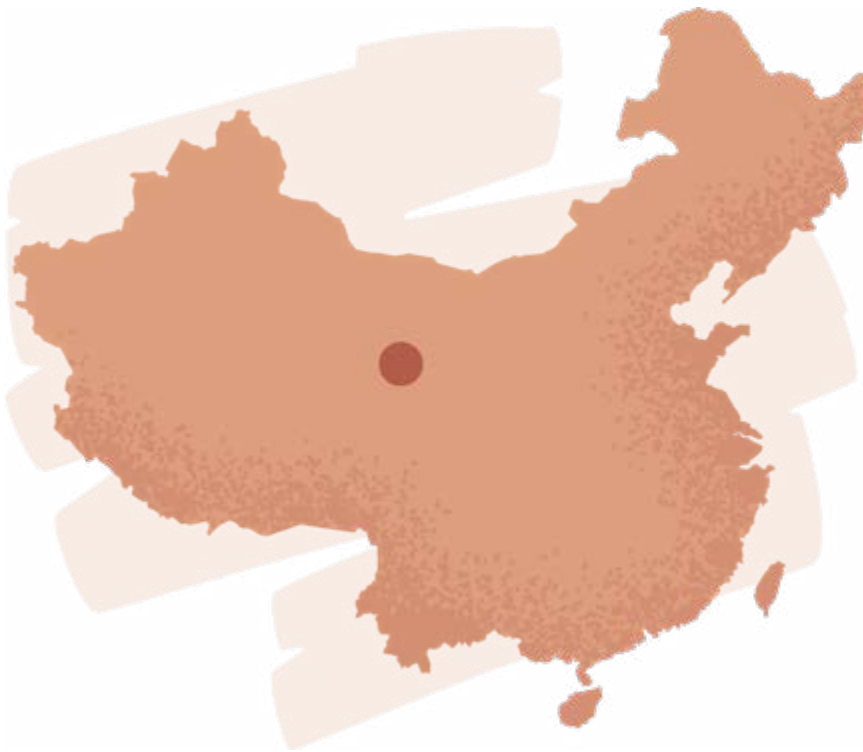
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## *Introduction* The Tibetan Plateau



Home to thousands of yaks and the nomads that tend them, Qinghai and Gansu provinces used to belong to the Tibetan kingdom. Their history still breathes in the many monasteries that dot their windswept plains and soaring red-rock mountains, offering both astounding natural beauty and exceptional cultural windows for those willing to stray into China's more remote regions to find them.

Our week-long trip can't possibly cover all that Qinghai or Gansu have to offer, but we will certainly enjoy the highlights. A cross between wilderness and cultural exploration, our journey will take us to national parks, secluded temples, and village stays in a quest for authentic immersion.

While Qinghai and Gansu are known as the Gateways to Tibet, the area's unique culture is also influenced by its large Muslim population and proximity to Mongolia.

Still undisturbed by the furor of tourism, Qinghai and Gansu offer the chance for true adventure. Be prepared for challenges of every kind, whether picking up a new phrase in Tibetan or breathing at an altitude of more than 4000m, and also for the chance to create memories that will last a lifetime.

## *Qinghai & Gansu*

# Map & Details



### DEPARTURE DATE

18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021  
(Thursday)

### RETURN DATE

25<sup>th</sup> February, 2021  
(Thursday)

### PRICE

RMB 10,600  
(does not include airfare)

### SIGN-UP PROCESS

To express your interest and reserve your space, please email [travel@thehutong.com](mailto:travel@thehutong.com).

Our team will provide a registration form to complete, give updated travel information, and answer any questions you may have.





## *Qinghai & Gansu* **Destinations at a Glance**

The Hutong's Tibetan New Year trip gives travellers the chance to experience choice locations of these amazing provinces. We will visit the following places:

### *Rebkong*

Rebkong sits on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau in a region historically known to its nomadic inhabitants as Amdo. The town's origins stretch back several hundred years when it emerged around the establishment of the Longwu Monastery. Rebkong's elevation is 2,600 meters (8,530 ft) and the town is surrounded by several mountains and large expanses of nomadic pasture land. Rebkong is famous for its Tibetan traditional arts, cultural heritage preservation, and festivals. Here, we will experience the colorful dances and ceremonies for an intense insight into the deep spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism.

### *Labrang*

Stand on the corner of the monastery pilgrimage and allow the smells of burnt juniper and grain offerings to fill your nose. Listen to the creaking of spinning prayer wheels and bells tinkling in the wind as you enter Labrang monastery. Here, as you amble around the world's longest stretch of prayer wheels, you will encounter Tibetan pilgrims who have come to pray for their friends and family. The monastery, with 1,600 monks, 18 temple halls, and six separate institutes of learning, is a small city in and of itself and dominates the western part of Labrang town. The white walls and gilded roofs and endless alleys offer limitless opportunities to glimpse monastic life in action.



# Itinerary

## DAY 1 // Xining

You will arrive in Xining airport, where you will be met by your guides and driver. In the afternoon, we will visit the Tibetan Medical Museum and the largest Thangka painting in the world. This painting is a fitting introduction to our journey, telling the story of Tibetan people. After dinner, we will walk to see the New Year lights in Xining.



## DAY 2 // Rebkong

Rebkong (known in Chinese as Tongren) is famous across Tibet for its artists and hand crafted paintings. We will spend the afternoon exploring Tibetan Thangka painting at the Wutun Monastery. Today's highlight will be the grand ceremony of the Thangka display wall near the Wutun Monastery.

In the evening, we will eat a Tibetan style dinner and explore the town's Tibetan district.



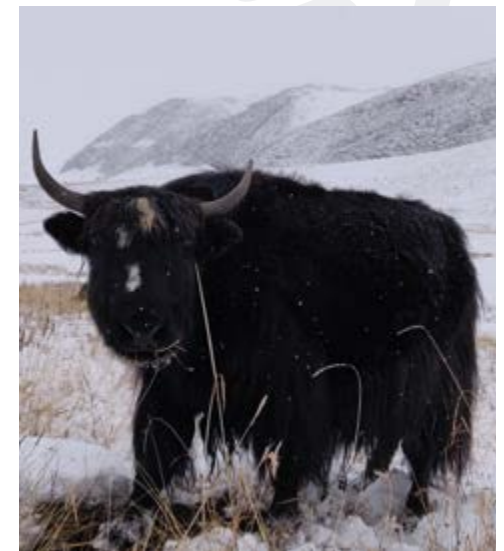
## DAY 3 // Bongya Monastery

In the morning we will take a short drive to Bongya Monastery. Bongya is a Bon Monastery that tells the story of the shamanistic origins that predated Tibetan Buddhism. After a special Bon ceremony, we will spend the afternoon exploring village life and special local ceremonies during the Tibetan New Year Festival. We will enjoy an authentic Tibetan dinner before returning to Rebkong for a second night.



## DAY 4 // Gomar Monastery

In the morning we will drive to Gomar Monastery, where Tibetans converge once a year to bring their milk tea and Tsampa and talk about the stories that have happened over the last year and to discuss their hopes and dreams for the coming year. Next, we will drive to Sanggeshong Yago to enjoy the ancient Cham Dance. This dance was created as the 4<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama meditated and entered the paradise of Shambala. Each monastery has created its own unique interpretations over the centuries since. The Cham performances and ceremonies feature sacred masked dances, sacred music, healing chants and spectacular, multi-colored costumes. With accompanying narration and a monastic debate, the program provides a fascinating glimpse into ancient Tibetan arts and culture.







## DAY 5 // Ganjia

Today we will visit Rebkong Rongwu Monastery, one of the largest monasteries in all of Qinghai and home to more than 800 monks today. We will also have the possibility to do some hiking in Rebkong above the monastery for a view of the town.

After lunch in Rebkong, we will drive 1 hour to Ganjia Monastery at 3,200 meters. Here, hidden meditation caves are tucked into the Ganjia river gorge. This is also a great chance for a short hike along a beautiful river under craggy 4000 meter peaks. We will visit a Tibetan family in the grasslands and spend the afternoon learning about nomad culture, before settling in our homestay in the Ganja grasslands at 2,900 meters.



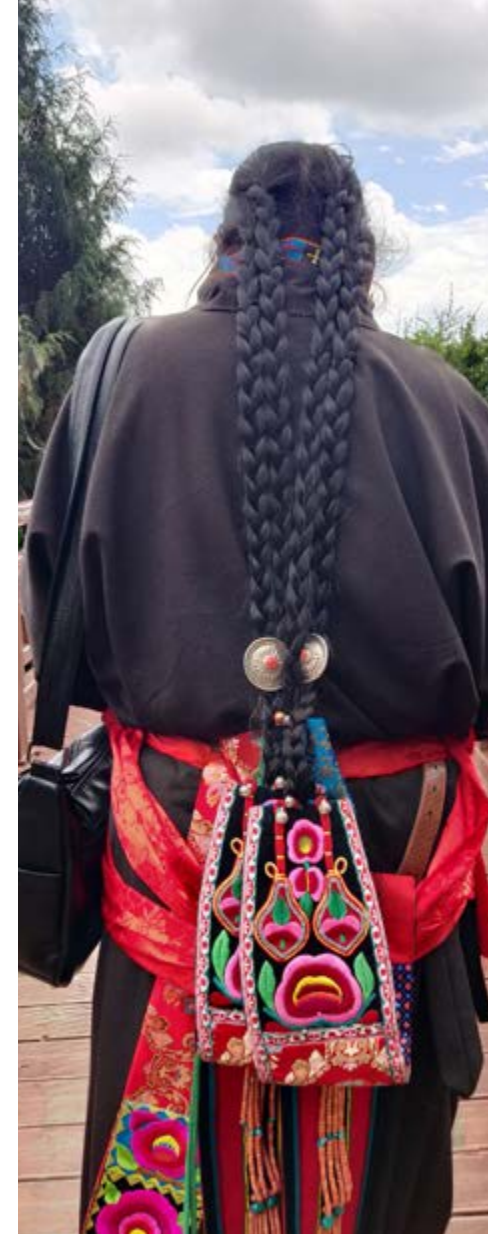
## DAY 6 // Labrang

Today we will drive to Labrang Monastery. Labrang is one of the six great universities of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism and is the most influential monastery in Amdo Tibet. We will visit the monastery and walk the kora with Tibetan pilgrims as they prostrate, see a traditional wood block printing press, and admire Buddhist sculptures that are entirely made of yak butter. After lunch, we will have some time to visit the traditional Tibetan markets around Labrang. In the evening, we will experience Labrang's monk debates. These debates are how monks enhance their understanding of Buddhist philosophy and study for their oral exams. We will spend the evening in a Tibetan boutique hotel in Labrang.



## DAY 7 // Labrang

The highlight of the Monlam New Year Festival is the giant Thangka display on the hill overlooking Labrang. We will join a large crowd of Buddhists who have been waiting since the early morning for today's special event, known as "The Annual Sunning of Buddha" ceremony. The huge Thangka will be carried out of the hall towards a mountain range to be spread along the slope of the mountain to reveal a giant 40 meter long painting of the Buddha. Along the way crowds of worshippers will gather around to touch the Thangka in order to gain a New Year blessing from hundreds of monks. Later these devout pilgrims will sing, dance and hold prayer sessions to celebrate the occasion. After participating in this ceremony, we will have lunch in Labrang and then retrace our steps back to Xining, where we will check into our hotel and enjoy our final dinner together.



## DAY 8 // Xining

After a hearty breakfast, you will get dropped off at Xining airport mid-morning, to say our goodbyes with a lifetime full of memories.

## *Important Information* **Fitness, Altitude & Difficulty**

While we're not preparing for a marathon hike, Qinghai's rugged terrain and steep altitude will still provide plenty of opportunities for physical challenge. Flying into Xining will bring us immediately to a height of 2,275 metres (~7,500 ft) above sea level and our day trip to the Ganjia Grasslands summits at around 4,000 metres (~13,000 ft). While there is always a risk of mild altitude sickness, we have built the itinerary specifically to ensure that with good health, things should go smoothly. Every effort is made to ensure your wellbeing and safety; as long as you are in good health, stay hydrated, and get enough sleep, you should experience little discomfort due to altitude.

Apart from your physical condition (training beforehand is not essential, but would help as we'll be spending plenty of time on our feet), it is important to note the packing requirements for this trip. Qinghai is known for its variable weather conditions, so bringing suitable gear will keep you happy and comfortable in the mountains. If you have any questions about equipment or would like recommendations on what to bring or buy, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Above all, keep in mind that we'll experience one of the more remote destinations in China, a neighbour to Tibet and Mongolia and far off the beaten track. Amongst everything else you'll pack, a wide smile and open heart are the most important items on the list. At The Hutong, we care about going the extra *lǐ*, because that one step further makes the rewards all the sweeter.





### *Trip Leader: Ben Cubbage*

Ben has lived on the Tibetan Plateau in Xining's Qinghai Province since 2010. He has a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and has spent considerable time teaching organic agriculture and sustainable development in Ghana and Liberia. He has extensive trekking experience, having completed the 4,240 km Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada, involving 32 km per day through 1,125 km of desert, over six months.

Ben has also thru-hiked the 3,440 km Appalachian Trail along the east coast of the US, and he has hiked extensively in Tibet and Nepal, guiding trips to the base camp of Mt. Everest, the headwaters of the Yellow River, and the base of Amnye Machen.

Ben has traveled extensively across the Tibetan Plateau and wants to share his passion for local culture and stunning scenery with you.

### *Cultural Tidbits*

Qinghai, literally translating to "Blue Sea", draws its name from the immense salt-water lake at its centre, the largest of its kind in China. The province is also home to the origins of the Yellow, Yangtze, and Lantsang Rivers, cascading from fountainheads of more than 6,000 meters (~21,000 ft) above sea level.

Its population includes almost forty ethnic groups, with national minorities accounting for nearly 50% of the five million who live there. Both Buddhism and Islam are very alive in the province, as witnessed by the many temples and mosques that draw devotees and tourists alike.



## Flights

The Hutong will recommend flights, and can help purchase tickets upon request, though we find it's often easiest for participants to book on their own. If we do help you purchase your ticket, we will not mark up flights. Please let us know your preference. If you have to cancel your flight or change your schedule, the terms and fees of the final booking will ultimately be the responsibility of the traveler.



## Arrival & Departure

This trip will begin and end in Xining. We will arrange a pick-up and drop-off service at Xining Airport, as well as provide necessary details if you are arriving a day or two earlier by train or plane.



## Meals & Snacks

We will be enjoying local cuisine throughout our journey, often prepared in a villager's home in a cosy family environment. Given the nomadic culture of the people, sheep and yak products, including meat, milk and yoghurt, form staples of the local diet. Some meals during the hiking parts of our journey will be served picnic-style, including sandwich staples and basic Western food, however there will be plenty of opportunity to explore a variety of snacks and local delicacies.



To keep up your energy on the hikes, we recommend you bring along some of your personal favourites as well, such as granola bars.

## Serendipity

Hutong trip leaders travel regularly to destinations to develop relationships with local contacts to provide the most authentic cultural experiences possible. As such, trip itineraries are subject to change, pending the discovery of an even better activity or destination. Itineraries may also be subject to change due to weather, traffic, or government policies.



## Accommodation

We'll be staying in a nice, comfortable hotel in Xining on the first and last nights. The rest of the time, we have more varying standards: four nights in hotels in Rebkong and Labrang, and one night in a Tibetan homestay deep in the Ganjia Grasslands.

Restroom and washing facilities are very basic at certain places, for example, the Tibetan homestay does not have hot showers and the toilets will be basic. We recommend packing plenty of wet wipes.

## Hiking & Elevation

Given Qinghai's average altitude of 3,000 metres, it's best to be prepared for altitude sickness. We recommend that you visit a travel medical doctor and ask about possible medication to combat its effects. Hikes can range between 3,000 to 4,000 meters in elevation and can be tailored to be easy or more challenging depending on the preferences of the group. If you feel any discomfort, you can always opt out of hiking or activities on that day.





## Tibetan New Year



Losar is the most popular festival in Tibetan Buddhism and is also known as Tibetan New Year. The holiday is celebrated on various dates depending on location (Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan all have various dates and traditions). The holiday is a New Year's festival, celebrated on the first day of the lunisolar Tibetan calendar, which corresponds to a date in February or March in the Gregorian or Western calendar.

## Winter Weather

Most of the areas we travel to are between 2,500 meters and 3,500 m in elevation. Xining, the capital of Qinghai at 2,300 m, is generally clear and cold in the winter with daytime temperatures of -5 to +10 Celcius, depending on the elevation. So you will need a good down jacket, gloves and a winter hat.



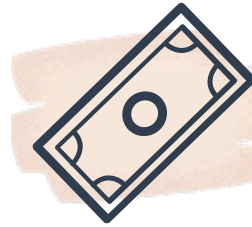
## Health & Covid-19



We recommend that you visit a travel medical doctor or consult with the CDC and ask about the following vaccinations: typhoid, polio, tetanus and Hepatitis A.

A Covid-19 test may be required prior to trip departure depending on current travel guidelines. We will notify you in advance of the trip if this is the case.

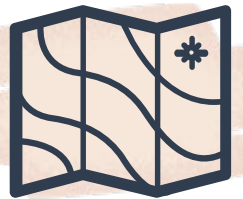
## Money & Extra Expenses



ATMs are plentiful in Xining, but hard to find in the smaller villages and towns. In most places you won't need money, except for snacks or drinks. There will be several stops along the way for local keepsakes, in which case you may wish to have a little bit of money; no more than a few hundred RMB should be sufficient, unless you'd like to stock your tea collection (in which case, you can spend as much as you like). Of course, you can always pay with Wechat or Alipay, too.

## Guides

Our Tibetan New Year Adventure comes fully-equipped with English-speaking guides who are familiar with the terrain and extremely knowledgeable about the area's culture, industry, and history. We also work very closely with amazing local guides who know and love the area; they help to provide all kinds of wonderful experiences.



## People



Tibetan people have their own distinctive cultural traditions. Along our route, you'll meet many of our knowledgeable local partners who'll happily share with you their cultures and traditions, meaning we're all sure to learn a lot and have some great conversations along the way.

*I recently enjoyed a multi-day trip filled with amazing scenery, inspiring hiking, delicious food and cultural immersion. The itinerary was a modified version of the package trip called “Tibetan New Year” and I highly recommend it for anyone desiring to get out of the hustle and bustle for a few days.*

*Our guide was very knowledgeable, while remaining flexible and adaptable in accommodating our needs and wishes. We enjoyed some amazing spontaneous moments that I will never forget. Thanks for a great trip!*

**Danielle W.**  
Trip Participant (2020)







*The Hutong*  
**A Bit  
About Us**

The Hutong creates unforgettable travel experiences throughout China for students from International Schools, and for people of all ages from around the world. Since 2009, we have run educational, and adult-travel, programs to off-the-beaten-track destinations across China. From the rainforests of southern Yunnan to the grasslands of the Mongolian steppe, all of our programs are meticulously researched and planned to optimize cultural exchange and to offer fun, innovative, and immersive experiences.

As well as being a licensed travel operator across Greater China, The Hutong is at heart a transformative education company. We partner with leading schools to build programs that incorporate learning objectives and life skills, all the while maintaining absolute professionalism and an impeccable safety record. From our team of international educators to our travel specialists, each and every Hutonger shares a passion for providing exceptional learning experiences.

Hutong programs engage with global issues and leave participants with broadened horizons, a renewed sense of their strengths and abilities, and incredible memories. No matter where we go, we aim to make a positive impact on the communities we visit and on the groups we lead.



**The Hutong**  
Sharing Culture, Sharing Knowledge



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